

The image shows the front cover of a book. The cover is a deep red color with a fine, pebbled texture. A faint, light-colored illustration of a bare, gnarled tree branch with a few small leaves is visible in the upper right quadrant. The text "December Greetings • 2009" is printed in a white, elegant serif font, positioned in the lower left area of the cover. A vertical crease or fold line is visible on the left side, near the spine.

December Greetings • 2009

2009

A shower passes through,
like a friend stopping by
to say hello.

*

Walking,
I thought I heard someone behind me,
but it was just the wind.

*

A maple leaf on the street,
like an open hand someone left behind.

*

Years ago,
when people my age died,
I thought, They should be satisfied.

*

At my age,
visiting my parents' graves,
asking them for advice.

*

Looking into that mirror, my son,
my every detail magnified.

*

How did this happen?
After forty years, we agree on everything.

*

Beauty, or rather, the memory of beauty,
will have to be enough.

*

If I were to die today,
the world would just have to cope
without me.

*

Today,
I'm pretending to be mature,
one of my many disguises.

*

Like a Japanese bowl,
I'm more valuable
for having been broken.

*

Halloween,
when you can go up to a stranger
and ask for candy.

*

November snow:
just one of the many things
that I'm not ready for.

*

A touch of snow mixed with leaves,
a crazy salad waiting for the wind.

*

Every day,
in this vast empire, my body,
rebellions here and there.

*

Affection —
in the simplest way,
our dog asks for something so complex.

*

The little concrete boy in the garden
is up to his ears in snow.

*

Brussels sprouts —
it must be a lovely city
to name a vegetable.

*

She flies to the top of the tree,

and then, just in case,
she flies away.

*

They're quiet now,
but when I'm not around,
the deer must have lots to say.

*

Baby's breath —
the name is so lovely,
I decide to buy a handful.

*

I'm a Colosseum,
the place of a thousand battles,
and it shows.

*

The pretty girl
walks so proudly down the street —
a gift to the city.

*

Was I a success or a failure?
There must be someone I could ask.

*

The last snow of the year,

a precious legacy,
melting in my hand.

*

A string of traffic lights,
barely swinging in the breeze,
red, yellow, green.

*

From the plane,
the earth looks like
all those photographs
taken from a plane.

*

The language of insects,
the language of dogs —
so many still to learn.

*

The deer know I'm harmless;
should I be insulted,
or complimented?

*

How could it ever come to an end,
this amazing event, my life?

*

At age eighteen,
I thought I was unhappy,
but, of course, I wasn't.

*

Purple butterflies
settle on magnolia trees
and open their wings.

*

Arriving home —
for a moment,
I thought it was just another town.

*

Will she remember this,
years from now,
flirting with him in the museum?

*

The dogs must wonder
why we save their feces
in little plastic bags.

*

When they count foreclosures,
do they include nests
left over from last year?

*

Five o'clock —
general confusion,
as the birds wake up and have their say.

*

Age seventy,
and I'm still all over —
premature rigor mortis.

*

I just want to play, our dog says,
as the rabbits and squirrels run away.

*

What a deadbeat I am;
I must have a thousand debts
I haven't paid.

*

The old man stands on the shore,
watching ice floes of memory
float away.

*

We're in the middle of an avalanche,
huge boulders just missing us.

*

The ant scurries over my foot—
just another hill for him to climb.

*

Like a novel or a poem,
the rose unfolds itself
day by day.

2013

The letters in our new mail box
somehow seem
more important now.

*

This crossword puzzle is a bear.
Fifty years on,
and I'm still working on the first clue.

*

Begin every day with a poem
and get it over with.
(with thanks to W. C. Fields)

*

This old skin I sleep in every night—
like a suit I should have sold
years ago.

*

Women have no illusions,

they know the cost of everything,
including love.

*

It will happen very slowly,
one second every million years.
Even so, I'm glad
I won't be around
when it happens.

*

Am I proud or sad,
to pass my father's "Sell by" date
by ten years?

*

For this, I gave up
family and friends,
for a hearty handshake at the end?

*

When you have a job,
you succeed or fail every day.
When you don't,
you neither succeed nor fail.

*

I have no time, I have no time,
I'm too busy doing nothing.

*

In this place, no one is alone;
everyone comes with a bodyguard of ghosts.

*

Growing old, dying, lousy weather —
Oh, Margaret, you deserve better.

*

Is she so beautiful
because she's so young,
or because I'm so old?

*

A hard choice:
recognition now,
or immortality when I'm dead?

*

On the beach —
I'm smarter than the waves,
smarter than the sand,
a genius compared to the sky,
so I'll enjoy it all while I can.

*

At least it celebrates spring,
the nest they built
in our Christmas wreath.

Years later,
she still keeps her husband's voice
on the answering machine.

*

At the parade:
we all applaud
the chainsaw jugglers
and the golden retrievers.

*

On my last day,
I sit down
and write another thank you letter.

*

What makes death difficult
is that, for a moment,
we were immortal.

*

Finally, at seventy-two,
I have an excuse
for all sorts of things.

*

Retirement--
like a small bird,
swinging back and forth
on the thinnest reed.

*

Was it enough,
the hour or so we spent
remembering our friend?

*

The rain kept me awake
until I decided
it was beautiful.

*

Bending down,
the stag catches his antlers in the tree
and shakes the leaves.

*

I hear someone standing,
breathing, outside my door;
can it be my wife?

*

After forty years —
sometimes, our silence is empty,
and sometimes full.

*

Retirement —
a haircut becomes
the major appointment of the day.

*

The secret army of deer
slips into position
in yard after yard.

*

At a certain age,
you become nostalgic
even about your mistakes.

*

Lying in bed,
I listen to the wind
test the house
at every joint.

*

We can't be immortal,
but we can act
as if we deserved to be.

*

Old age —
at least the cat
is willing to climb onto my lap.

*

At the shop of good and bad deaths,
the sign says, What have you got to offer?

*

Winter —

should I have gone with him,
that man who stopped me for directions?

*

The dog and the baby in the stroller
look at each other in amazement.

*

Wild nights, wild nights!
I've never seen the willow trees so excited.

*

What is it worth,
an extra week,
an extra day,
an extra hour?

*

It's a relief to know —
preparing for the worst
is a waste of time.

*

Last night,
she almost told me her secrets,
and I almost told her mine.

*

Secretly, selfishly,
I'm hoping that I'll be the first
to go.

*

I like to walk with our dog;
it makes me look harmless,
even absurd.

*

Queens for a day,
a whole royal court of lilies
surrounds the house.

*

Walking through the field —
the grass reminds me
of the rain last night.

2015

On the bus--
reading about Basho's travels
on foot.

*

Strangely,
like Ulysses,
I always thought that home
was a place you could leave.

*

Unlike most arrivals —
the closer we get,

the less clear, the more unknown.

*

The amazing thing
is not that we will die,
but that we were alive.

*

They're so polite today —
the perfect curve of the waves,
the smooth sheet of foam.

*

A hundred compromises accepted,
but some turned out better
than expected.

*

When you're young,
you think you have choices.
When you are old,
you think you chose.

*

It's so strange,
to be so old and yet so strong,
so strong and yet so old.

*

Lying in bed,
deciding to make

the first decision of the day.

*

Tired from doing too much,
tired from doing too little,
but grateful for having the choice.

*

Which memories
should I sort through today —
what I did, or what I didn't do?

*

At my age,
I should be thinking big thoughts,
getting ready.

*

The world is a patient teacher;
you can fail
as often as you like.

*

When I drop the leash,
she waits for me to pick it up.
The leash means freedom.

*

My body was once my slave,
but now,
rebellions are breaking out all over.

*

I can't quite give up the idea
I might attract that pretty girl.

*

I wish
beauty were a kind of pill
that I could take every day
and never overdose.

*

I put off the moment
when I turn out the light
and admit the day is over.

*

How strange —
the one thing that lonely people want
is to be left alone.

*

Beauty —
so much is contained in the word,
implied, regretted, hoped for.

*

With my wife —
watching the wind
batter the trees.

2018

Senior Moments, II
(written in a retirement community)

This is the place
where old people go,
to visit their parents.

*

Work or retirement —
a hard choice
between wasting time doing something
or wasting time doing nothing.

*

I wasn't old
until I went to an old people's home;
old age is catching.

*

Is this a hospital or a home?
A little bit of both.

*

Everybody is nobody here,
no matter what you were.
You make yourself
every day.

*

In line at our café —
“I’m in a hurry,
my husband is dying.”

*

If this is what life is like when I’m lucky,
God help me when I’m not.

*

There are so many exotic diseases these days,
cancer and heart attack
seem kind of safe.

*

Christmas here:
a hundred flowers
waiting at the front desk.

*

What a perfect marriage!
We take turns being sick.

*

This is the world of second chances,
of last chances,
a new beginning at the end.

*

Those days when I don’t want to live
and don’t want to die,

it takes a lot
to get out of bed.

*

To be old is to worry,
especially when there's nothing
to worry about.

*

From the first,
I knew we owed the gods a death,
but I didn't know
we owed them two,
yours and mine.

*

If someone's really old,
you hate to waste their time
saying hello.

*

We think about the past every day,
that abandoned building
we forgot to tear down.

*

These days,
I talk to myself even more,
now that people can't hear me.
(Did they listen before?)

*

This is the test:
can you be patient and kind
to people who are dying?

*

Old age —
when suddenly
everything around you
seems fragile.

*

When someone tells you
her husband is doing well,
you know he isn't.

*

We use ski poles in every season,
even in summer--
in preparation, I suppose, for winter.

*

This is a strange world,
so comfortable and safe,
and yet so close to pain and death.

*

This place is such a good subject for poetry,
let's hope nobody comes up with a miracle cure.

*

I forget things I shouldn't forget
and remember things I shouldn't remember.
I think too much.

*

Watch out for those wheelchairs!
They're just showing off,
or getting back at us
for walking.

2019

Senior Moments, III
(written in a retirement community)
A notice in our auditorium:
"Dear Alzheimer's Patients:
Please don't talk during the concert.
It disturbs the other guests."

*

Of course, we love our children —
without them,
we wouldn't have our grandchildren.

*

The challenge here:
you're nobody now,
but you can't forget
you were somebody once.

*

Just in Case

Of course, I'll go first,
but just in case,
please write a note
to your successor
(not replacement, no, never!),
a brief note explaining me.

*

Advertisement
MOURNER FOR HIRE —
YOU DIE, WE CRY
a public service for every occasion,
every gender, every religion,
loud or soft,
and all you can eat at the wake.

*

Waiting for My Knee Replacement
A few helpful comments:
"It's very painful – worse than a hip."
"It's a real deal."
"You're walking so much better now,
you really don't need an operation."
And then someone stole my walker —
or rather, walked away with it.
Even my cane clicks
every time I take a step.
Thank God
they operate tomorrow.

*

The Day After
People are so nice to me,
I must be very sick.

*

Here,
you're out of step
if you're perfectly healthy.

*

Each of us is known for our illness,
and each day,
we're either better or worse or the same.

*

We grow smaller year by year.
They say it's age,
but maybe, too,
it's the way that time
keeps lopping off
our jobs, our homes, our friends.
We're left with who we are,
nothing more, but nothing less.

*

We have so little time left,
we have all the time in the world.

*

My wish for everyone here —
a healthy life, an easy death,
and a lot of money left over.